



## News Bureau

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## Backgrounder

### Alcohol and college campuses

#### **The issue:**

Each year we hear about the number of college students who go out to celebrate a birthday and end up drinking so much they develop alcohol poisoning. During the 2004-05 school year, at least seven college students died from alcohol poisoning. Hundreds of others die from alcohol related incidents. The power hour of drinking 21 shots during the first hour a person turns 21 has become a deadly tradition.

#### **The events:**

At New Mexico State University two students died from alcohol poisoning during the 2004-05 school year. Both were celebrating birthdays. Both were drinking off campus. Both had so much alcohol they became unconscious and were rushed to the hospital. Both died.

#### **NMSU response**

A **task force** that has continued to meet on the issue of student safety, binge drinking and student choices.

The most **recent additions** to the university response to the issue of alcohol use are:

- ❖ **Student summit** convened on Feb. 1 to encourage student leaders in their efforts to educate students on healthy choices. Contact: Jennifer Burn ASNMSU; Casey Akins
- ❖ **Jason Robert Kilmer**, nationally known addictive behavior specialist, was invited to campus in early January, 2006, to provide more guidance and instruction on how to deal with the issue. He met with counselors, students and members of the Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education team as well. Contact: Dr. John Irvine, Director, Counseling Center
- ❖ On Nov. 2, **Blaine Lee** from the Covey group spent nearly four hours with a group of students, faculty and staff discussing “Alcohol and Decision-Making; Students Moving Forward.” The workshop was intended to get people to think about how behaviors can be

changed. Approximately 30 students attended the session. They came up with visions of what NMSU would look like in five years:

- Reduced alcohol use
- No alcohol-related deaths
- A student body engaged in community works
- Trips to Juarez would focus on community service – not alcohol.

A new graduate position has been housed at the on-campus Greek Complex. This area is an opportunity to define a new direction in how NMSU supports and fosters the on-campus Greek complex and its users. The new GA will,

- Help organizations promote activities in compliance with all policies.
  - Assist in developing stronger relationships with NMSU the University Police Department and Residence life.
  - With the direction of the director of campus activities and associate dean of student create a Greek review board tasked with setting expectations and accountability. A board of students also will be created to address occurrences not in compliance with university and national policy.
- ❖ A new chartering process for all student organization will be in effect to ensure reasonable and safe conduct standards. Failure to adhere to those standards could result in suspension or revocation of charter.
  - ❖ During Aggie Welcome Week programs featuring healthy choices concerning drug-alcohol decision making were presented. They included
    - An interactive program by David Helstrum, noted alcohol educator.
    - A round table discussion of alcohol and violence
      - A four-act play that addressed alcohol abuse, sexual assault and diversity.
  - ❖ Safe Walk Program: ASNMSU sponsor a program funded by student fees and staffed by screened students Sunday through Thursday from sunset to 12:30 a.m. and covers the entire NMSU campus including up to two blocks beyond NMSU.
  - ❖ NMSU Night Ride Program is free to students. It operates from 9 p.m. until 5 a.m., seven days a week, for students who find themselves in difficult situations.

**Past actions:**

A **WebCT** course was developed by the student counseling center and information techs that focused on alcohol education. It was pilot-tested in two English classes and a computer science class. While the course was tweaked to meet the questions raised during the pilot program, it was decided to integrate the subject matter into **English 111**, a class that will reach up to 90 percent of NMSU students. The course work on alcohol education is one of a half-dozen segments in the class designed to help students think critically, discuss issues and write knowledgeably and well on those issues. In addition, peer counselors will visit the classes during the segment on alcohol to help lead discussions and answer questions.

Beginning fall 2005, **birthday cards** will be sent to students approaching their 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays urging them to celebrate responsibly and detailing the symptoms and results of alcohol poisoning. A similar card will be sent to the parents of the students urging them to help reinforce the “celebrate safely” theme.

In May 2005, a **community forum** convened under the leadership of NMSU. Participants included the local newspaper, the Las Cruces Sun News, the mayor, the county commissioner, the public school superintendent, student leaders and representatives of families impacted by alcohol abuse. A file of all resources available to deal with alcohol abuse was compiled. And the intention is to continue to grow the community forum so that other universities in the region/state become involved.

Peer counselors in the **Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education (W.A.V.E.)** program continue to work in groups and one-on-one to raise awareness among students of the dangers of excessive alcohol and other unsafe habits. Programs have been sponsored in residence halls and in the Student Union Building, Corbett Center.

The campus police department sponsored a visit from the Attorney General of New Mexico and brought **Alcohol 101** – a virtual reality teaching tool – to campus.

A new **alcohol policy** is in effect that clearly delineates permissible use of alcohol consistent with local, state and federal laws. The policy also delineates unacceptable use of alcohol and outlines disciplinary actions that will be taken in situations if it occurs. In conjunction with these

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prohibitions are policies concerning alcohol related misconduct. New tailgating procedures also are in effect.

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